

on the run tonight by alessandriana

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Summary:

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Nancy paused in closing the door to give him a once over, quick and businesslike but still with an edge of concern. There was a leaf stuck in her messy ponytail, black blood on the hems of her jeans and dirt on the knees, and a shotgun held loosely in her right hand.

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Author's Note:

- For [Sholio](#).

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"No, really. I feel faint. I think my feet are starting to go numb. That's a bad sign, right?" Steve let his head loll back against the wall, seeking out Jonathan with fever-bright eyes. "Back me up here, man," he said.

Six months of instinct-- of always having to hide this thing between the three of them-- had Jonathan hesitating; but there was no one there but them, so he allowed himself to bring up a hand to Steve's forehead, brushing sweat-soaked hair out of his eyes. Steve closed his eyes, turning his face easily into Jonathan's palm. His skin burned radiator-hot.

"Your hand feels good," Steve said, slurring a little.

Jonathan laughed a little. "You're usually the one complaining about my cold hands," he said. Quieter, to Nancy, he added, "He does have a pretty high fever. He should really see a doctor. Do you think we should try making a break for the car--?"

She grimaced, coming over to kneel next to Steve. "That thing is still out there," she said, pressing two fingers against his neck to check his pulse.

While she did that, Jonathan pulled Steve's shirt carefully away from his ribs. The wound hadn't been very big-- not much more than a

deep scratch, really, that they'd wrapped up as best they could with Jonathan's jacket. And it had been barely more than an hour, hardly enough time for it to get bad. But when he lifted up the bandage, he could see dark red lines of infection crawling up Steve's side, and heat radiated from the wound. Nancy hissed out a breath.

"Carrion crawler," Steve said, stomach clenching as Jonathan's hands felt along the edges of the wound. His fist clenched in the dirt by his side, and Nancy reached down to cover it with her own; Steve turned his hand to tangle his fingers with hers.

"What?"

"s what... Dustin called it. All those legs. From their dungeon manual thing." Steve swayed. Jonathan let the shirt drop-- it wasn't like there was anything he could do about it anyways-- and shifted to provide a supporting shoulder.

Nancy sighed. "Is it sad that I actually know what he's talking about?" she asked Jonathan, rhetorically. "Anyways-- I caught a glimpse of the *carrion crawler* while I was setting the trap. We could try, but it's so fast, I don't know if we could make it in time. Can you run?" she asked, addressing Steve directly.

Steve waggled his free hand. "Signs are hazy," he said. He let his hand drop, boneless, back into his lap.

Her eyebrows scrunched down. "Can you *walk*?"

Steve peered down at himself. "...Probably?" Then he threw his arm over his mouth and started coughing, deep wracking ones that made Nancy wince and Jonathan clench his fists. By the time Steve was done he was leaning against Jonathan, panting for air and utterly spent. "...s-shit," he said.

"I think that answers that question," Jonathan said.

Nancy nodded, business-like. "You'd have to carry him, and I can't protect you both while we do that. We're going to have to wait."

Jonathan's mouth thinned, but he ducked his head in agreement.

They settled in. Jonathan pushed and pulled at Steve until he was more comfortable, head settled on Jonathan's shoulder. Nancy settled in next to the door, where there was a knothole she could see out of, and kept the shotgun ready. Five minutes passed, then ten. Dust sparkled golden in the sunlight where it filtered through cracks in the old wood. The forest around them was silent and still, Hawkin's usual birdsong replaced by a frightened hush.

Steve coughed and shifted fitfully, pressing his face into the crook of Jonathan's neck. He was sweaty, and kind of gross, but Jonathan didn't mind; this way he could monitor Steve's breathing more closely. It had a thick quality he didn't like.

"Anything?" he asked quietly, once fifteen minutes had gone by.

Nancy shook her head. "It's too quiet out there, it has to be somewhere nearby." She paced a few steps. "Maybe... maybe we need to give it some better bait."

Jonathan lurched forward, heart pounding. "Nancy Wheeler, don't you *dare*," he hissed.

"I'd stay within running distance of the cabin! I just need to draw it into the trap!"

"Are you out of your damn mind? You'd get yourself killed!"

"It worked for Steve that one time!"

"For fuck's sake, both of you *shut up*," Steve said. Jonathan turned to see him propping himself up against the wall, gone white with the effort.

In the sudden silence, Jonathan heard... skittering.

Nancy threw herself back to the knothole, peering outside. "There it is," she whispered. "It's climbing down the big tree across the clearing. It's headed... it's headed towards the trap. It's taking the bait." Her hands clenched on the shotgun.

Behind them, Steve coughed again, a wet and ugly sound.

"Quiet!" Nancy hissed, flinging out a hand. "It stopped moving."

Steve drew a strangled breath and held it. Jonathan wrapped an arm around his shoulders, and Steve pressed himself into Jonathan's side, trembling with the effort of not coughing.

"It's headed that way again," Nancy said, after a tense moment.

The loud *snap* of the trap engaging was drowned out by the high-pitched *SKREEEEEE* of the injured monster. Jonathan clapped his hands over his ears. Steve let out his breath in a great exhausted sigh and slumped over. Nancy threw open the door and took aim with her shotgun, firing once, twice, three times. The sound died down.

"Is it dead yet?" Jonathan asked.

Silhouetted against the sunset light in the doorway, Nancy shook her head. "Still twitching."

Jonathan rooted around on Steve's other side until he closed his hands around the bat.

Several hard smacks later, and the carrion crawler was little more than a mess of flattened black goo with an ungodly amount of legs. Jonathan attempted to wipe the bat off in the leaves at his feet, which was only marginally successful. He kept it at arm's length as they headed back to the cabin so the slime would at least not drip on him. He could feel the adrenaline and terror fading, being replaced by shaky relief. He ducked inside the cabin, and stopped in his tracks, feeling his blood turn to ice water.

Steve was still slumped over on the floor, and he wasn't moving, he wasn't--

"Shit, *Steve*." Nancy shouldered past him and dropped to her knees next to Steve, hands going for his pulse. Jonathan couldn't move, he felt frozen in place, and-- then Nancy looked up. "He's breathing," she said, relief obvious in her own voice, and Jonathan felt his knees go weak. "Just passed out, I think. Can I get a little help here?"

"R-right. Sorry." Jonathan handed over the nail bat, and Nancy helped Jonathan get Steve draped over his shoulder; he was solid, all

lanky muscle, and Jonathan's knees creaked as he stood, feeling Steve's fever-warm skin against his cheek.

They made their way to Jonathan's car, which at least had the benefit of a large back seat, and Nancy crawled in with Steve to keep him from sliding around too much. Jonathan turned the keys in the ignition with hands that definitely didn't shake. The hospital was at least twenty minutes away.

They made it in ten.

Steve came up from unconsciousness in a slow, hazy slide. He recognized the sickly sweet smell that meant *hospital*, and for a confused moment he was back in the waiting room, holding vigil with the others for Will. But he hadn't been injured then; now he felt shivery and weak, like someone had wrung him out like a dishtowel. There was a warm weight on his left and a hand holding his on the right. He peeled his eyes open, wincing as the light stabbed his eyes. It was Jonathan and Nancy, of course; both sound asleep, Nancy with her hand tangled in his and Jonathan with his head pillowed on his arms. The light coming in through the window indicated it was probably early morning.

His brain hadn't come back enough for words, so instead he just squeezed Nancy's hand, as the one within easiest reach. She started upright with an inelegant snort; it took her a moment to focus, but then her eyes widened. "Steve! You idiot."

Steve laughed, then winced as pain flared up his ribs. "Hell of a way to say good morning," he said, pressing his free hand into his side. Oh, ow. The skin was still hot and tender to the touch, though not as bad as he last remembered. There was an IV in his elbow, and a drip bag over his bed, pumping-- antibiotics, maybe? He hoped it was triple strength. God only knew what kind of germs the creatures from the Upside Down carried.

Jonathan raised his head, pushing the hair back from his face. "What she means," he said, groggily, "is that she's glad you're awake. So'm I," he added. "You had us scared for a while there."

"Sorry," Steve apologized reflexively. He wracked his brain, but the last thing he remembered was huddling on the dirt floor of the cabin while Nancy and Jonathan were outside, doing... something. "Did you guys get the--" He had to pause, realizing he had no idea what their current cover story was, "--thing?" he finished weakly.

Nancy snorted. "Hopper went out last night and removed the *rusty barbed wire* you fell into," she said.

"I-- what?" Steve frowned at her.

Jonathan leaned closer, dropping his voice. "We thought you'd appreciate not having to get rabies shots," he said. "There's a lot of very long needles involved, apparently."

Steve shuddered. "Oh. Yeah, thanks." He let his head fall back onto the pillow, shifting in a vain attempt to ease the throbbing in his side.

Nancy's hand hovered over his ribs, just brushing the hospital gown. "Does it still hurt?" she asked, halfway to standing. "I can go get the doctor, I'm sure they can do pain meds or something--"

Steve snaked his hand out and grabbed hers again. "No. Stay, please," he said, and before he could talk himself out of it, did the same with Jonathan. "Both of you."

Jonathan struggled for a moment, trying to pull his hand away. "Steve, we're in public, someone might see--"

Steve coughed fitfully. "Don't care," he said, firming his grip. Jonathan relaxed gradually, though he kept throwing nervous glances at the door. "Seriously, it's a hospital, I'm sure they've seen weirder things. It's *Hawkins*."

That got a strangled laugh out of them both. Steve relaxed, feeling exhaustion pulling him back under. Just as he was about to fall back asleep, Nancy leaned over and pressed a kiss to his forehead. "Get some rest," she said.

"We'll be here when you wake up," Jonathan added, squeezing his hand.